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ABSTRACT

Evaluation is as basic to professional development as it is to education. Unfortunately, systematic evaluations of professional development programs are rarely, if ever, undertaken. Professional development has become polluted by extraordinarily presumptuous rhetoric about the intrinsic value of "development." In the recent flurry of activity those involved in or developing such programs are preoccupied with program activities, or processes, and have lost sight of the real goal of educational improvement. Most have forgotten that higher education is a system and must be approached as such. For far too long evaluation has been presented as polar--either strictly quantitative or strictly impressionistic. In fact, neither methodology is adequate by itself. Quantitative evaluation pays no attention to the merit of established program goals and gives no consideration to the configuration of people, events, processes, and practices that characterize the environment in which a program operates; evaluations yielded tend to be voluminous but dull, insensitive, technical reports. The other approach concentrates solely on program processes, eschewing judgments about the program's worth. Holistic evaluation, a hybrid of the two approaches, is an eclectic approach that includes process and product, description and quantification and goals and attitudes. This comprehensive approach is particularly well suited to the myriad of programs for professional development. (MSE)

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EVALUATION: The Misunderstood, Maligned, Miscontrued,
Misused and Missing Component of Professional Development

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Evaluation is as basic to professional development as it is to education. Unfortunately, as is so often the case in education, systematic evaluations of professional development programs are rarely, if ever, undertaken. Development programs of one sort or another have sprung up almost everywhere -- from state systems and community college districts to individual departments. Millions of dollars have been provided in the name of faculty or professional development. But the quality of these programs goes virtually unchallenged.

Professional development has become polluted by extraordinarily presumptuous rhetoric about the intrinsic value of development, per se. Various experts in "instructional" development, "personal" development, "organizational" development and other arbitrary and illogical divisions of development run around the country extolling the virtues of one or another of these components or the different foci of programs -- people orientation versus course orientation (?) -- as well as the advantages and disadvantages of various so-called "models" of development.

We have embellished professional development by surrounding it with all of the excess verbiage and convoluted pedantry of

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the most incomprehensible educational jargon. We have elevated the term (heaven forbid we would never call it in-service training!) and thereby avoided the implications of evaluation. After all, we are building models, conceptualizations, theories and formulas. The fact that we are also actively engaged in the day-to-day operation of programs which influence the lives of hundreds of faculty, who in turn influence the well-being of thousands of students, does not seem to matter.

In the course of this flurry of activity, people interested in establishing professional development programs, and even those already involved in them, have become preoccupied with the activities of the program. The single most dangerous deficiency in professional development is this preoccupation with process. Professional developers have lost sight of the goal that gave rise to the professional development movement in the first place -- improving the quality of education -- and they have often lost sight of the goals of their own programs. The means have become the ends and the initial purposes of the programs have been forgotten.

In the stampede to jump on the bandwagon, most professional developers have forgotten that higher education is a system, composed of people (students, teachers and administrators), buildings, books, courses, curricula, programs and environments. The operation of higher education involves a set of mutual, interrelated functions and relationships which operate together to achieve a defined purpose: providing students with an opportunity to learn. A change in any one of the components of that system affects the other components, their operation and their relationships. Each component and each program in the system must be accountable for

that portion of the teaching-learning process over which it has or should have control. Accountability for results, including those of professional development programs, is a system concept, and the systematic evaluation of these programs is equally as crucial as is the systematic evaluation of instructional programs. The intellectual and emotional lives of the students, as well as the well-being of the faculty or administrator participants, are being influenced positively or negatively because of professional development programs.

But few, if any, attempts have been made to rigorously evaluate the impact of professional development programs. Because of this lack, although the national professional development movement has been around for at least two or three years and in the lives of some of us it has been almost a decade, we have no evidence whatsoever of the consequences of the programs, intended or otherwise. We have no evidence of the impact of the programs on the participants, let alone the institutions or the students. Whatever evaluative information has been offered to date to attest to the value of the programs has been based primarily on subjective perceptions, tantalizing tales and exotic anecdotes.

Evaluation, of course, poses many problems for professional development programs. To begin with, professional developers, as a rule, are not trained as professional evaluators, although a few apparently operate under the delusion that they are. As persons involved in the programs, they also are not objective.

Secondly, evaluation is a high-stakes game and is particularly threatening for those who view it as a win-lose situation. Unfortunately, few people view systematic evaluation as a tool for program improvement. Considering prevalent practices in evaluation, their reluctance is understandable.

While many different evaluation models based on different orientations and employing different strategies are known to the student of evaluation, for far too long, professional evaluators have presented to the public only two polar positions regarding evaluation -- the strictly quantitative and the strictly impressionistic. Both methodologies have certain advantages, but neither are adequate by themselves.

The purely quantitative or psychometric approach characterized many of the large scale national evaluations which received great attention during the first blush of the accountability movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Strict adherence was given to pre-assessment measurements, experimentally controlled or manipulated treatments and standardized measurements of results. No attention was paid to the merit of the goals established for the program in the first place or the changes which often take place once a program has been initiated and in turn influence program outcomes. No consideration was given to the configurations of people, events, processes and practices which characterize the environment in which the program operates. Evaluations of this ilk yielded voluminous but dull and insensitive technical reports replete with measurements and statistics which are used by

practitioners today as examples of what not to do in evaluation. Obviously, this approach should not be used to evaluate professional development programs.

Unfortunately, however, most people in professional development equate evaluation with this type of approach. As a result, the obvious problems with quantitative evaluations have led to an understandable reactionary but equally deficient approach which focuses on the environment or "milieu" and is based entirely on description and interpretation. The evaluator using this approach focuses on intrinsic criteria -- documenting and describing what it is like to participate in the program, what the significant features of the program are, and how the program is influenced by other elements in the environment. Of course, these elements are important. But this approach concentrates solely on program processes. It scorns quantitative assessment and "outcomes" is a dirty word.

Sadly, this approach is particularly appealing to the fairhearted. Because it typically eschews making judgments about the worth of a program, this approach is obviously tempting for professional developers who wish to avoid the risk of finding their programs impotent. All they have to do is chronicle whether or not the participants enjoyed the program, how the students and administrators responded to the program, how the program staff feels about respective responses, announce the project as a success, and move on to explore bigger and better professional development territories. The narrative descriptions of programs are richly evocative and record isolated but unique experiences that no instrument can measure, but the results of this type of evaluation,

although interesting, are distorted and untrustworthy. They cannot be used either to document the success of the program or as a basis for program improvement. If this approach is used to evaluate development programs, we will move no further in our search for understanding the consequences of professional development.

Lest one think the case is hopeless and that assessing the impact of faculty and professional development is as elusive as the fountain of youth, let me offer a third strategy which is a hybrid of the two approaches described previously. It is an eclectic approach which combines the best of the two extremes, and includes both process and product, description and quantification, goals and attitudes, objective data and subjective perceptions. This strategy is called Holistic evaluation (obviously, it must have a name). The name is intended to suggest comprehensiveness, not Godliness. In my opinion, it is particularly well-suited to the myriad of programs included under the rubric of professional development.

Briefly, Holistic evaluation rests on three basic assumptions: 1) that there is a purpose for activities such as professional development and that this purpose is related to the purposes of the institution in which it has been established and thereby, it is related to the goals of higher education; 2) that professional development activities are not ends in themselves, but are related (or should be) to meaningful and measurable results, and 3) that professional development activities are intended to result in improved faculty performance and student learning.

Although the actual procedures are, of course, situation-specific -- varying according to the nature of the program, the number of participants and all of the other programmatic variables that affect the operation of a program -- Holistic evaluation is concerned with three major areas. First, it is concerned with the social-psychological environment in which the program operates and the interaction of the various elements in the system. Holistic evaluation is also concerned with the attitudes, values and interests of the participants. But, even more important, Holistic evaluation is attentive to the outcomes of the program, as well as both its intended and unintended consequences.

The main disadvantage of this approach is that you become responsible for the results of your program and run the risk that the program may not truly measure up to your expectations. The advantage of using the Holistic approach to evaluate professional development programs, however, is the increased probability of realizing the outcomes pursued. If we are pursuing the appropriate goals and this too can be scrutinized in an outcomes-oriented approach, and if we use Holistic evaluation to determine both their achievement and their consequences, professional development may finally begin to fulfill its promise of becoming a worthwhile educational endeavor.